Northwest Territories Housing Corporation

PROGRESS REPORT

NORTHWEST TERRITORIES HOUSING CORPORATION

CORPORATE PLANNING PROJECT

June 11, 1987

INTRODUCTION

This report has been written to bring members of the Legislative Assembly up to date on the progress of the internal review of the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation. It describes the work that has been done within the Corporation in the two years since the Legislative Assembly's Special Committee on Housing tabled its Final Report.

BACKGROUND

During the summer and fall of 1984, the Special Committee travelled to over 40 communities gathering suggestions for improving housing in the N.W.T. In June of 1985, it published its Final Report which defined the scope of the housing problem and presented 82 recommendations for changes in policy and practice. The Final Report represented the most comprehensive study of housing issues ever conducted in the NWT.

Five months later, in October of 1985, the Executive Council, published its response to the Special Committee's report. The document, entitled The New Era in Housing: Planning Together for the Future, provided both a short-term and a long-term plan. It isolated the recommendations of the Special Committee that could be dealt with in the short-term and recommended specific actions to be taken by various departments of government. For the more complex and longer-term recommendations, it suggested that the Housing Corporation initiate a Corporate Planning Project to thoroughly assess these issues.

In December of 1985, a Steering Committee was established to begin this project. The Steering Committee, consisting of the Minister, the Chairman of the Board, the President and senior Corporation managers, set up a Project Team and approved a work plan. The work plan consisted of three phases. The first phase looked at the Housing Corporation as it was, identified its major strengths and weaknesses and determined priorities for organizational development. This first phase, the ASSESSMENT PHASE, took six months. During the next phase, the DEVELOPMENT PHASE, the Project Team prepared a draft Corporate Plan and Strategy. This working document outlined major target areas and results that the Corporation wished to achieve over the next several years. The document was approved by the Steering Committee in mid-September, 1986.

In October of that year, the project entered the IMPLEMENTATION PHASE. Although substantial progress has been made to date in implementing the plan, it will take a total of twelve to eighteen months to complete this third phase.

GATHERING THE INFORMATION

During the six-month Assessment Phase, various methods were used to gather information. People were interviewed about the Housing Corporation and its strengths and weaknesses. Over seventy managers at all levels of the organization, both in Yellowknife and the Districts, were interviewed. Workshops were held with Board Members and with a small group of Secretary-Managers from various housing associations/authorities. In addition, a number of special studies and projects were conducted.

As the Project Team presented detailed information to the Steering Committee, it quickly became obvious that criteria were required to evaluate the information. The Steering Committee requested the Project Team to develop a set of evaluative criteria, and the Project Team went back to review the research and public hearings transcripts of the Special Committee on Housing. The result was the development of the "New Context for Housing Services".

THE NEW CONTEXT

As the Special Committee travelled from community to community listening to concerns about housing services, three basic principles seemed to emerge time and time again. Residents of the N.W.T. feel that housing services should be provided in a manner that promotes:

- accountability to and by the local community;
- community development; and
- economic development.

When the delivery of housing services promotes these principles, the Housing Corporation is seen to be working effectively. In recognition of this, the Housing Corporation adopted a "New Context" for housing delivery which incorporates the principles of community development, economic development and accountability.

MAJOR CORPORATE ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In assessing the performance and organization of the Housing Corporation in light of the "New Context", the Project Team identified nine major issues that needed to be addressed.

Policy

The review of the policy framework indicated a lack of clearly articulated and comprehensive policy statements. The absence of broad guiding policy within the Corporation made it difficult for the Corporation to develop its programs within the context of government policy and priority.

To respond to this deficiency, two recommendations were made.

#1. THAT THE N.W.T. HOUSING CORPORATION ESTABLISH, THROUGH THE GOVERNMENT OF THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES, A COMPREHENSIVE HOUSING POLICY WITHIN WHICH THE GOALS AND MANDATE OF THE HOUSING CORPORATION ARE CLEARLY DEFINED.

#2. THAT THE HOUSING CORPORATION ESTABLISH A POLICY UNIT, REPORTING TO THE PRESIDENT, WITH THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND PROVISION OF APPROPRIATE MANAGEMENT SUPPORT SYSTEMS.

Information

The Special Committee on Housing noted that the Housing Corporation lacked adequate information systems to assist managers in decision-making. To address this issue, the Project Team recommended:

#3. THAT THE HOUSING CORPORATION ESTABLISH AN INFORMATION SYSTEMS UNIT WITH THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR DEVELOPING NECESSARY SYSTEMS, MAINTENANCE PROCEDURES AND SUPPORT SERVICES.

Programs and Services

Though it was not within the mandate of the Corporate Planning Project to conduct formal program evaluations, it became apparent that there was a need for a formal review of programs and services within the "New Context". Also, because there is a general lack of evaluative procedures within the organization,

managers are not obtaining reliable information about program performance or about the relationship between program results and the resources required to achieve them.

Two recommendations were made:

#4. THAT A REVIEW OF EXISTING PROGRAMS AND DELIVERY SYSTEMS BE CONDUCTED WITHIN THE NEW CONTEXT.

#5. THAT THE HOUSING CORPORATION DEVELOP A PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT SYSTEM.

Roles, Relationships and Structures

Interviews with managers and Board Members revealed that there was a lack of clarity as to roles and responsibilities, both within the Corporation and in relation to outside groups. The relationship between the Corporation and the GNWT has to be confirmed, as does the relationship between the Corporation and the housing associations/authorities. Within the Corporation, there is a need to clarify the relationship and responsibilities among the different divisions and between Headquarters and the Districts.

The Project Team recommended that a formal review be carried out at each level of the organization. This procedure would identify the functions necessary to achieve the Corporate Goal and support the local housing associations/authorities.

Two recommendations were made:

#6. THAT THE CORPORATION CONDUCT A FUNCTIONAL REVIEW TO DETERMINE SKILLS, RESOURCES, ROLES AND INFORMATION REQUIREMENTS WITHIN THE DELIVERY SYSTEM.

#7. THAT THE HOUSING CORPORATION REVIEW, AND, IF NECESSARY, REORGANIZE ITS STRUCTURE TO REFLECT A DECENTRALIZED DELIVERY SYSTEM AND MANAGEMENT ENVIRONMENT.

Human Resource Development

The Corporate Planning Project found that the Corporation did not focus as much attention on its employees and the employees of the housing associations and authorities as it should. The Corporation did not have a fully-developed human resource capability to ensure the provision of long-term resource and succession planning, organized staff training and development, implementation of affirmative action plans, etc. It was therefore recommended:

#8. THAT THE CORPORATION DEVELOP A HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT UNIT TO ADDRESS ITS REQUIREMENTS.

An Approach to Development

Interviews at the District and community level indicated that there were serious problems in the working relationship between the District Offices and local housing associations/authorities and basic differences in terms of role definition. For the most part, headquarters had not developed a "corporate approach" to local housing organizations and seemed to consider them the exclusive responsibility of the Districts. It is apparent that there is a need for a development strategy that will clarify expectations and commit the Corporation and local housing organizations to work together to achieve specific objectives. To accomplish this objective, it was recommended:

#9. THAT THE HOUSING CORPORATION, IN COOPERATION WITH LOCAL HOUSING ORGANIZATIONS, CREATE A DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR THE DELIVERY OF HOUSING SERVICES.

PROGRESS TO DATE

While the full implementation of the Corporate Plan will take between twelve and eighteen months to complete, significant progress has been already been made. This section summarizes these achievements.

#1. THAT THE N.W.T. HOUSING CORPORATION ESTABLISH, THROUGH THE GOVERNMENT OF THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES, A COMPREHENSIVE HOUSING POLICY WITHIN WHICH THE OBJECTIVES AND MANDATE OF THE HOUSING CORPORATION ARE CLEARLY DEFINED.

The Housing Corporation has presented to the Executive, through the Minister, a clear statement outlining its mandate and approach to housing services. This document provides the policy direction for the Corporation within which its strategic programs and policies can be developed.

In addition, considerable work has been completed to prepare a policy on community development and accountability to and by the communities. This policy will guide the introduction of new working agreements and relationships between the Corporation and housing associations/authorities and other community groups. Other policy priorities include: guiding policies on corporate relationships with CMHC; comprehensive strategies on homeownership; relationships with other

government departments; property management; energy conservation policies; housing for the elderly, etc. These policies will be developed by a new Policy and Evaluation Unit.

#2. THAT THE HOUSING CORPORATION ESTABLISH A POLICY UNIT, REPORTING TO THE PRESIDENT, WITH THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND PROVISION OF APPROPRIATE MANAGEMENT SUPPORT SYSTEMS.

The organizational structure and reporting relationship of a new Policy and Evaluation Unit have been developed and all job descriptions have been classified. The Chief and Secretary positions are now filled and the recruitment process for the remaining positions is underway. The work to be managed by the Unit not only includes policy development but will also include program evaluation and the management of the Corporation's information systems to ensure effective decision-making.

#3. THAT THE HOUSING CORPORATION ESTABLISH AN INFORMATION SYSTEMS UNIT WITH THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR DEVELOPING NECESSARY SYSTEMS, MAINTENANCE PROCEDURES AND SUPPORT SERVICES.

The assessment and description of the information and systems required to guide effective management decisions is currently a subject of review by the Auditor General of Canada.

Specific reviews of management information and processes required to ensure the integrity of the key programs of HAP, construction of public housing and property management are the principal areas of examination.

The request for assistance by the Auditor General of Canada should help meet the intent of this recommendation. The design and implementation of new systems to address the information requirement of managers will become the responsibility of the Policy and Evaluation Unit.

#4. THAT A REVIEW OF EXISTING PROGRAMS AND DELIVERY SYSTEMS BE CONDUCTED WITHIN THE NEW CONTEXT.

The Corporation has recently contracted with private consulting firms to evaluate the User-Pay Program and HAP. The results of these evaluations will be available by the fall of this year. In addition, a program review committee has been established within the Corporation. The purpose of the committee, which will have community-based representation, is to regularly review the major programs of the Corporation (HAP/public housing) and to make recommendations for change in time to influence the subsequent year's delivery. A major

review of the Corporation's programs against the context of community development, economic development and accountability to and by the community will become the responsibility of the Policy and Evaluation Unit.

#5. THAT THE HOUSING CORPORATION DEVELOP A PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT SYSTEM.

A performance measurement system has been developed for the Corporation by a private consultant. The system includes regular review and evaluations. A manual has been prepared and all staff have been instructed in the new system. The performance management system was introduced through the development of six-month objectives (October to April, 1987). These were used to guide the Corporation for that period and will form the basis of performance assessment at year end. Annual objectives for the current fiscal year have now been developed.

#6. THAT THE CORPORATION CONDUCT A FUNCTIONAL REVIEW TO DETERMINE SKILLS, RESOURCES, ROLES AND INFORMATION REQUIREMENTS WITHIN THE DELIVERY SYSTEM.

and

#7. THAT THE HOUSING CORPORATION REVIEW AND, IF NECESSARY, REORGANIZE ITS STRUCTURE TO REFLECT A DECENTRALIZED DELIVERY SYSTEM AND MANAGEMENT ENVIRONMENT.

The response to these two recommendations is being handled as a special project.

The general purpose of this project is to determine how the Corporation should be structured to effectively achieve its Corporate Goal and to make optimal use of available resources.

A private consultant has been hired to complete this work. The contract commenced on June 1, 1987, and should be completed by September, 1987. The results of this work will be a clearly articulated statement of the functions of the housing associations/authorities and each management unit of the Corporation. The accountability relationship between the housing associations/authorities, the District Offices and the divisions in headquarters will be clearly identified. The consultant will also develop a strategy for implementing any organizational change identified during the review.

#8. THAT THE CORPORATION DEVELOP A HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT UNIT TO ADDRESS ITS REQUIREMENTS.

A Human Resources Development Division has been established within the Corporation. The Personnel Unit, formerly part of Finance and Administration, was removed from that Division and established in a direct reporting relationship to the President. The Division was also given a broader mandate and directed to develop programs which address the priorities of affirmative action, human resource planning, orientation, evaluation, assessment and training. The Division has also been requested to evaluate the assistance and support it can offer to housing associations/authorities in the areas of human resource management.

#9. THAT THE HOUSING CORPORATION, IN CO-OPERATION WITH LOCAL HOUSING ORGANIZATIONS, CREATE A DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR THE DELIVERY OF HOUSING SERVICES.

The Special Committee on Housing emphasized the importance of involving local communities in the housing delivery process. This emphasis is reaffirmed in the "New Context" for housing delivery.

Considerable work on this recommendation has been done and a preliminary strategy has been developed. The strategy addresses three basic elements:

. identification of housing services to be devolved to communities;

. development of a framework for delivering housing services that fits within the "New Context"; and

. implementation of the strategy in the communities.

At the same time this project is developing, ongoing negotiations are taking place with several communities to integrate the delivery of housing into the municipal government structure. Results of these negotiations will be used to refine the community development strategy prior to final implementation.

CONCLUSION

The Corporate Planning Project is creating new opportunities for the improved delivery of housing services in the Northwest Territories. Ultimately, a new "corporate culture" is being established within the Corporation - one that links the delivery of housing services to the principles of accountability to and by the local community, community development and economic development. It is a long and complex process, however, significant progress is being made, and future progress should add to the achievements realized to date.